

2002). Zentral ist der Aufruf, diesem Rechtsdiskurs Initiativen folgen zu lassen, welche die Wahrnehmung dieser Rechte befördern und aus Rechten Wahlmöglichkeiten machen, die die Lebensqualität von Männern und Frauen umfassend verbessern. Der gezielte und spezifische Einbezug von Männern in Entwicklungsprogramme ist zwar längst keine neue Forderung mehr (Cleaver 2007). Überzeugende Projekte sind dagegen seltener.

Schliesslich möchte ich auf die von Chant erhobene Forderung nach der Dekonstruktion von Kategorien zurück kommen. Unter Entwicklungsfachleuten wächst die Bereitschaft, ganzheitliche und der Komplexität verpflichtete Herangehensweisen zu unterstützen. Dies ist unter anderem eine Folge von Studien, die gezeigt haben, dass einseitig technologieorientierte und auf einem durch eine ökonomische Perspektive geformten Entwicklungsverständnis basierende Massnahmen wenig überzeugende Ergebnisse hervorbringen. Eine der grössten Herausforderungen der nahen Zukunft wird es sein, die Herstellung von Kategorien im Zusammenhang mit Entwicklungsfragen kritisch zu betreiben und zu begleiten. Die Verwendung von Kategorien geschieht im Wissen, dass im Moment ihrer Anrufung die Kategorie bereits instabil ist. Darunter fallen Kategorien wie der Haushalt, der „female-headed Household“ und sein unausgesprochenes Gegenüber (male-headed Household?), die Familie, „traditionell“ bzw „modern“ oder die Kategorie der „Ärmsten“ – einige dieser Kategorien werden erst über Entwicklungsforschung respektive Entwicklungsinitiativen konstituiert. Der dekonstruktivistische Ansatz öffnet einen machtvollen Blick auf Machtverhältnisse und naturalisierte Strukturen, die einer gewünschten sozialen Transformation entgegen wirken können. Das differenzierende Vorgehen ist erhellend, und wirft dennoch Fragen auf. Die zentrale davon ist jene nach der Handlungsfähigkeit. Hier liegt auch die besondere Herausforderung an der Schnittstelle von Entwicklungszusammenarbeit und Sozialforschung: Inwiefern ist es möglich, differenzierte und dem dekonstruktivistischen Ansatz verpflichtete Analysen zu leisten und gleichzeitig den Dialog mit den Partnerinstitutionen im Hinblick auf die Umsetzung, und das letztlich politisch motivierte Ziel des sozialen Wandels zu führen?

Navigating gender equality between the tradition and the modern

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This article is about my experiences in gender-related research in Africa and how I think gender equality can be better achieved for both African men and women. It seems to me that a perspective of development using a gender lens is still strange to many local development actors in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), in particular the public administration. Yet it is the public administration (government) that issues policies and regulatory frameworks for development interventions. Although, such local development actors experience and know that development actions and stressors have differential impacts on men and women, in many cases action does not go further than this passive acknowledgement and the assertions that a differential focus on men and women can lead to better development. Gender is neither a concept that is always self-evident, nor is action to achieving gender equality. Why this low active acknowledgement of gender in SSA?

I can only provide explanations based on my field experience in SSA as there is little or no empirical study addressing this question. It may be that „gender equality“ is a luxurious problem“ for SSA countries. I explain this by arguing that in many SSA countries poverty is widespread and as such, the public administration and the local population are more concerned with their day-to-day survival. For the public administration, this means striving to ensure that wages are paid, that there is enough food in the country, that health risks are addressed in time, that potable water is available to more people or that agricultural productivity is increased. Meanwhile the many poor strive to meet the basic needs of food, health and shelter. How to get the next meal on the table is thereby a more fundamental concern for many poor households who com-

prise more than 40 percent of the SSA population than the question of ensuring that the food once gotten is shared equitably among the household members. My research shows that it is women who forfeit their share first, followed by men, to ensure that the children and the elderly have enough food to eat. Also the women will taste the food first to make sure it is consumable (in cases of food scarcity like drought, when food is often redefined) and are subsequently among the first to suffer from food poisoning. So under these circumstances, how can gender relations, equitable sharing of benefits or gender equality be at the top of the agenda both for the public administration and the local population?

Another explanation that comes to mind is the issue of worldview and traditions. Suffice it to say, that where traditions have evolved with the modern, that gender equality is no longer something that is fought over, but has become self-evident. I refer here to the urban areas, where the dominant culture is a blend of the tradition and the modern, or to households with many educated members. My personal experience is that in such cases, people in such households have achieved a certain level of well-being, been exposed to other worldviews and can raise their voices in cases of perceived inequality. This is not to say that the traditional culture discriminated against women – rather my explanation is that the context within which African traditions shaped people's lives is no more, hence the traditions too, should evolve as the context changes. But this is not the case in many SSA areas. Therefore, in this sense, the persistence of traditions does not augur well for gender equality in Africa because in most cases, patriarchy and patrilineal inheritance systems define access to resources. This means that women can traditionally only access resources such as land through her husband and his family or through her father and brothers. This is in contrast to the few matrilineal systems whereby access to resources is not strictly through female lines.

Even in some areas in today's SSA, a woman can purchase a cow but traditional society still expects that only her husband or male members of her husband's family have the right to sell the cow, because livestock, especially large stock is a man's business. In many places, a brother in law can "inherit" a woman if her husband dies. The issue of secure access to land is crucial for rural livelihoods especially as women make up the larger proportion of the farming population. Still, a woman's marriage and her children define her access to land. Should her husband die and should she have no children, her access to farmland is insecure, and depends on the decisions of her male in-laws, despite modern state laws. However, there are also cases where women have stood up against such practices successfully – to my knowledge, mainly educated or exposed women or those who have the courage to disobey traditions. These traditions persist despite modern state laws on gender equality (where they exist). However, if one would want to solve the problem of insecure access to resources, a gender lens exposes the fundamental disparities in secure access to resources between African men and women.

The men on their part are under stress of expectations to meet their roles as breadwinners. A man not meeting this role, by providing the lion share of household needs is seen to fail by the traditional society. Even in cases where the wife earns more than the husband, such wives in many cases seek to keep the impression that it is the man that provides for the household, lest he loses face in public. Thus, the persistence of cultural practices that no longer fit the contemporary context is a burden both for men and women. An avenue for men to reduce this pressure is to re-define their image of self and to accept that in contemporary African society, women can contribute a lion share to household upkeep.

Often, I have observed that these traditions take hold where the actors are not educated. I argue that such traditions are less prominent among the educated and in the urban areas. In cases where the actors are educated and know about their rights in modern state law, equality in access to resources is more likely to be achieved.

Yet the implications of different value systems - the traditional laws and the modern African state laws - , means that not only rural dwellers have to navigate between these value-systems, but also even the urban educated sometimes give in to some of these values. However, because of their education and exposure to other worldviews, urban educated women seem to me to be in a better position doing this than the poor rural uneducated. The educated women in rural areas are also in a good position to achieve equality in access to resources but they are more exposed to the pressure of keeping to traditions than those in the urban areas.

Traditional gender roles and relations are hardly questioned. They are usually taken as given. Once I was on fieldwork and we were analysing the daily routines of men and women. It turned out that the women worked 16 hours daily while men worked only 6 hours. When confronted with this fact, the men in that community appreciated the fact that women were working longer hours. The men themselves suggested that they take over some chores, which were traditionally female. However, some were of the opinion that if the work burden were still too heavy for their wives, they would marry additional wives. So, as a researcher or policymaker, how do you talk about gender equality in such a context where people are still embedded in past traditions?

These are some of my field experiences. I do not take the position that traditions are bad. In fact, some traditions should be guarded from extinction. One of my messages is that traditions need to be slowly adapted to evolving social-ecological conditions (includes social, political, cultural, economic, ecological) so that traditions do not become a contributory factor to reduced well-being. The majority sees those that do not adhere to tradition as deviating and should not be emulated, while others secretly find them to be role models. So you may ask, what is the implication for gender research, for development research, -policy and practice?

Gender equality can be better achieved in combination with measures addressing social problems like poverty reduction and livelihoods security. We should also remember that the local development actors (including public administration) are themselves embedded in these traditional contexts described above. I also think that an empowerment of both men and women to actively work to achieve gender equality lies in addressing the widespread poverty, in education and skills acquisition. Educated men and women are exposed to other world views, generally have the capacity to feed themselves and their households, are no longer dependent on natural resources for their livelihoods and also know about their rights in modern state laws. Of course, gender remains one of the many lenses with which such empowerment measures are planned and implemented. With such an integrated approach, gender equality becomes one of the goals, for instance, in conjunction with education and skills acquisition. We should also consider that the number of African men and women who are educated and skilled have not reached a critical mass to sustain efforts to achieve gender equality, which should also have an active African indigenous component.

On a personal note, I still find gender an interesting and fascinating analytical tool as it opens a window on how communities and societies function in reality.